

VZCZCXRO2399
OO RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM RUEHNH
DE RUEHGO #1743/01 3341002
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 301002Z NOV 06
FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5467
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0048
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3640
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7146
RUDKIA/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 0742
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2957
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0620
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001743

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP AND IO; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/30/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: ICRC WON'T GIVE UP ON BURMA

REF: A. RANGOON 1622

[1](#)B. RANGOON 1727

Classified By: P/E Chief Leslie Hayden for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The recent announcement by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) that the GOB was forcing them to close their five field offices in Burma was not timed to coincide with Gambari's briefing to the UN Security Council, ICRC officials insist. They issued the statement to quell rampant rumors the ICRC was pulling out of Burma completely. ICRC will continue to engage the GOB in hope that restrictions placed on them recently will be lifted in response to international reaction. The ICRC plans to keep its Rangoon office open and continue its important prosthetics and family visitation programs in Burma. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) ICRC Country Representative Pierre-Andre Conod reviewed the latest developments during a November 29 meeting with pol/econ chief. Conod said the ICRC issued its November 27 press statement, announcing the GOB's closure of its five field offices in Kyengtung, Taunggyi, Hpa-an, Moulmein and Mandalay solely to quell rumors flying around Rangoon and abroad that ICRC was pulling out of Burma completely. The timing, Conod insisted, was coincidental and not planned to piggyback on Gambari's briefing to the UN Security Council.

[1](#)3. (C) Conod said that after his October 23 meetings in Nay Pyi Taw with the Minister of Home Affairs, when ICRC was first ordered to close their field offices (ref A), he requested a meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The Minister, surprisingly, agreed to see him. The Foreign Minister said he couldn't comment on the Minister of Home Affairs' decision, but acknowledged that the decision to close the ICRC offices had been made by the "very top Generals." Conod also informed us that the GOB told Gambari during his November 9-12 visit to Burma that they believed the ICRC has a hidden agenda to expose Burma's political prisoners and aid ethnic insurgents.

[1](#)4. (C) In response to the Home Affairs Minister's October 23 instruction to close ICRC's field offices, the ICRC President in Geneva summoned Burma's Perm Rep on November 17 and

demanding an explanation. He told the Perm Rep the GOB's decision was unacceptable and the ICRC would react. Following the Geneva meeting, Conod tried repeatedly to obtain another meeting with the Minister of Home Affairs, but received no reply. On November 27, ICRC decided they could wait no longer, and issued their press release. "ICRC has been patient with the regime for two years," Conod emphasized. The President of the ICRC was willing to travel to Burma to meet with senior Generals, and Conod said ICRC had requested such meetings for months. Once again, the GOB did not respond.

15. (C) Seeking any way possible to get through to the regime, Conod told us, both he and the previous ICRC Country Rep Patrick Vial met with the Chinese Ambassador in October to enlist China's assistance in pleading the ICRC case to the GOB. The Chinese Ambassador told them he could not intervene and simply urged patience. The Ambassador said the Chinese expected to see progress from the regime soon, especially in the area of forced labor and cooperation with the ILO. The ICRC's meeting with the Chinese took place prior to the ILO's failed efforts to reach an agreement with the GOB (ref B).

16. (C) Conod told us he will travel to Nay Pyi Taw again next week to meet with officials at the Ministry of Home Affairs. He wants to gauge the GOB's reaction to the press release and prepare a strategy for the future. Conod stated the ICRC will continue to urge the GOB to lift all of its restrictions on ICRC humanitarian activities. The ICRC's Rangoon office will remain open and they will continue their prosthetics program. They will also maintain their Family Visiting Program, through which the ICRC funds and helps families of political prisoners visit their imprisoned relatives monthly.

RANGOON 00001743 002 OF 002

17. (C) Comment: International reaction to the regime's order to close the ICRC field offices in Burma may have taken the GOB aback. In response to a journalist's question at an official press conference on November 29, the Chief of Police claimed the field office closures were only temporary, while the GOB "re-focused" operating guidelines for INGOs (septel). While the ICRC will continue to try to roll back the new restrictions, regime hardliners appear to have gained the upper hand and it is doubtful the GOB will give any ground. The Generals regard the ICRC as particularly bothersome because of its neutrality mandate that obligates it to assist political prisoners and members of the armed ethnic groups. The regime's recent decisions to give the ICRC and ILO the cold shoulder make it even harder for regime apologists to argue that any political progress is being made in Burma. End comment.
VILLAROSA